

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

She treats it as the key which the Father put into
the hand of
the Word to unlock the gate of eternal life, and
which the Word
left with His vicar at the Ascension. All the
faith is founded
upon it. Each soul receives it into her hand at
baptism, and
must fasten it, with the cord of detachment, to the
girdle of
resignation to the will of God. Like poverty,
obedience is a
bride of souls, a queen enthroned above the
tempests of the
world. Besides the general obedience to which
all are bound,
there is the special obedience of the religious life,
shown in its
perfection in the ideals with which Benedict, Francis,
and Dominic
founded their orders. The chapter dealing with
the Franciscans
and Dominicans, the sublime ideals of their two
patriarchs who
based their rules on poverty and learning,
respectively, and the
degeneration of their followers, is thoroughly
Dantesque in spirit
and in expression. Catherine has, however,
worse things to
record against the friars of her own order than
those which the
divine poet puts upon the lips of the Angelical
Doctor ; even the
vow of chastity is continually broken, and the light
of science
perverted by them to darkness. The days of
Thomas Aquinas,
whom Catherine ever names with profound
admiration and
marked personal love (he was one of the saints
with whom she
used to speak in her visions), and of Peter Martyr,
whose career
appealed to the sterner side of her character, have
passed away.¹
The resemblance at times between Catherine's
phraseology, as

well as her thought, in the *Diakgo* as in the
Letters, with that
of Dante, is not likely to be entirely fortuitous.
Although she
never mentions the poet, and assuredly had
never read the
Divina Commedia^ she must frequently have heard
his lines quoted
by her followers. Neri di Landoccio, at least,
appears to have

¹ Cap. 158. Cf. Dante, *Par.* xi., xii., and xxii. 73-93. The encyclical letters issued by Fra Elias of Toulouse, as master-general of the order, in 1368, 1370, and 1376, strikingly confirm Catherine's testimony as to the corruption and degeneracy of the Dominicans at this time. "We have come to such a pass," he had written in 1376, "that whoso cares for the ceremonies of the Church is pointed out with the finger, and whoso keeps the rules of the order is reckoned by the others as of singular life." See *Monumenta. ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum Autoriea*, torn. v. pp. 306-312.